**‍Possible Selections for 2013 FC Book Club**

**Perfect Peace** by Daniel Peck - The heartbreaking portrait of a large, rural southern family’s attempt to grapple with their mother’s desperate decision to make her newborn son into the daughter she will never have  
  
     When the seventh child of the Peace family, named Perfect, turns eight, her mother Emma Jean tells her bewildered daughter, “You was born a boy. I made you a girl. But that ain’t what you was supposed to be. So, from now on, you gon’ be a boy. It’ll be a little strange at first, but you’ll get used to it, and this’ll be over after while.”   
     From this point forward, his life becomes a bizarre kaleidoscope of events. Meanwhile, the Peace family is forced to question everything they thought they knew about gender, sexuality, unconditional love, and fulfillment.[(less)](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6969591-perfect-peace)

**Girl in Translation** by Jean Kwok - I read this book in one day for my Teaching American History Grant Program. I very much enjoyed this read - much more so than I thought I would. The book tells the story about Kim Chang and her Ma who come to New York City from Hong Kong in the 1970s. Kim was in the 6th grade and the story talks about her trials and successes adapting to her new country socially, culturally, and economically. This is the type of book I would want my Republican friends to read as it tells the real story of immigration. It is impossible to imagine what it must be like to come to a brand new country, work as hard as you possibly can just to survive, and have little to no hope of moving up in the world. This book challenges the American dream myth and does so in a realistic way. I could not help but root for Kim at all parts of the story.  
  
What makes the book really work for me is that it does not just follow the "everything comes out ok in the end" philosophy that most books follow. The story was raw and realistic. Recommended to all.

Historical Fiction

**Mudbound** - Hillary Jordan's first novel, *Mudbound*, is a story of racism and well-kept secrets. Set on a desolate farm in the Mississippi Delta at the end of World War II, the novel explores the complex relations between two families: the owners of the land, and the sharecroppers who live and work on it.

The novel earned Jordan the Bellwether Prize for fiction, an award founded by author Barbara Kingsolver to promote literature of social responsibility. The cash prize and publishing contract is awarded bi-annually to an unpublished author.

Kingsolver says *Mudbound* is a beautifully written novel that examines the roots of racism through the distinct voices of its characters.

"I love that you understand everybody, even though everyone isn't right, and in the long run some people are very wrong," she says. "But you begin by feeling their own perspective, and you have some sympathy for every character." [http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88195380](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88195380%20)

Historical Fiction

**My Father’s Message to Putin** – by Pavel Khodorkovsky, the son of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, former CEO of the massive Russian oil company Yukos.

Starting in 2002, the Russian government pursued Yukos with fraud allegations and high tax demands that couldn't be met by the company, whose assets were eventually frozen by the government.

President Vladimir Putin says Khodorkovsky, who was arrested on fraud charges, was jailed because he was a criminal. Khodorkovsky's supporters, however, say he was prosecuted because he funded opposition political groups and Putin wanted to make an example of him. The human-rights group Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience.

Pavel Khodorkovsky, who has not seen his father since he left for college in the United States in 2003, begins his piece with an image of his father in prison:

"His hands numb after queuing in the bitter cold outside, my father squeezes into a phone booth and dials my number. Thousands of miles away in the U.S., I hear his dear voice, still husky from the frosty Karelian air. His tone has its usual calm; his mood is upbeat."

Brown says with this article, Pavel Khodorkovsky is trying to get his father back on the public's radar.

Non – Fiction

**Prague Winter** by Madeleine Albright - Brown says the common theme to each of her recommendations is the idea that one chooses whom they want to be morally — something that Madeleine Albright, the first female secretary of state, writes about in her memoir *Prague Winter.*

Albright, who in the 1990s discovered that she had Jewish ancestry, traces the history of her relatives who survived the Holocaust, and charts the painful experiences of those who died in concentration camps.

Albright constantly asks the question, Brown says, of what makes a person a resistor rather than a collaborator. In one passage, Albright writes:

"Why do some people become stronger in the face of adversity, while others quickly lose heart? What separates the bully from the protector? Is it education, spiritual belief, our parents, our friends, the circumstances of our birth, traumatic events, or more likely some combination that spells the difference?"

Brown recounts one story from the book, about a pair of heroic parachuters among a group sent from Britain to occupied Czechoslovakia. Josef Gabcik and Jan Kubis were sent to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich, Hitler's emissary to Prague.

Non-fiction

**Bring up the Bodies** by Hillary Mantel - When Hilary Mantel's new book opens, the spark has gone out of Henry VIII's second marriage. His roving eye leaves Anne Boleyn and begins to settle on Jane Seymour, another woman at court. The monarch doesn't go to a marriage counselor or divorce lawyer, not when Thomas Cromwell is his chief adviser.

*Bring Up the Bodies* is the sequel to *Wolf Hall*, which won the Man Booker Prize and worldwide acclaim. Itis also the latest in a planned trilogy about Cromwell.

Historically, Cromwell is considered a dangerous and unscrupulous bully. In Mantel's books, he is — like any other man — much more than his reputation.

"He's a work in progress, as far as I'm concerned. I'm far from being able to add him up. I'm not even trying at this point," Mantel tells *Weekend Edition* host Scott Simon.

She says some people expected the follow-up to *Wolf Hall* to be about Cromwell's fall, since the first book narrated his rise.

"But actually it's not like that at all. He will go on and on rising in the world until he becomes Earl of Essex," Mantel says, "and then his fall, when it came in 1540 — long after the action of this present book — was very, very sudden. In a few weeks, it was all over."

Mantel says Cromwell knows how to "work" the king — but only does so up to a point.

"Because, in the end, Henry needs to be told the truth, and he needs someone strong who can stand up to him," she says.

Historical Fiction

**The Hunger Angel** by Herta Muller - Nobel Prize in Literature in 2009. I can tell you I was pretty happy that I did. Nadirs was — is — a terrific work of short fiction, showing off Muller's powers as a world-class creator of fiction driven by visionary power. I was ready when her latest novel, The Hunger Angel, arrived in the mail. It's a latecomer to the crowd of books written about internment during World War II — doubly so, because the war ends when the internment of the main character begins.

Young (and gay) Leo Auberg, aRomanian-born of German descent, is 17 when the Nazis are defeated. He is arrested in a sweep by the occupying Soviets to find indentured laborers for Russia's coal and mineral industry. From January 1945 until the beginning of 1950, Leo works from before sunrise to after dark shoveling coal, hauling concrete and lugging bricks. He is consistently overworked and underfed — haunted by chronic hunger, or what he calls "the hunger angel" who lurks, and looking for an opportunity to seize him and pull him over into the darkness of death.

Sixty years later, Leo writes of his ordeal: "How can you face the world if all you can say about yourself is that you're hungry ... Your mouth begins to expand, its roof rises to the top of your skull, all senses alert for food." Even as Leo describes his constant state of hunger, he asserts, "No words are adequate for the suffering caused by hunger."

Muller deploys a large range of figurative language to make Leo's condition known to us, in images made of words but standing beyond language. Words about hunger, in fact, Leo says, "make up a map, but instead of reciting countries in your head you list names of food. Wedding soup, mincemeat, spare ribs, pigs knuckles, roast hare, liver dumplings, haunch of venison."

Seasons go by — adding up to years — as the novel increases in intensity in episodic fashion rather than by means of a well-made plot. Though striking characters do abound: the ruthless Russian camp commandant Shishtvanyonov; Tur Prikulitsch, the kapo who issues commands but does not work himself; the wrongfully imprisoned Jew Zither Lommer; Irma Pfeifer, who dies in a pool of mortar, frozen but immortalized; the dutiful camp barber Oswald Enyeter; the attorney Paul Gast who steals his wife's food; and others, all hoping to endure the tortures of hunger, cold, harsh labor, ferocious boredom — the chapter on boredom is one of the most fascinating you'll ever read on the subject — and unjust internment. As with Irma Pfeifer, not all of them do.

Leo endures, of course, surviving to tell this dark and urgent story. The method Muller deploys to portray such endurance should last as well. Perhaps, like me, you'll be waiting for each of her new books from now on.

Historical Fiction

**The Alienist -** The historical mystery was once a pretty moribund sub-genre. Sure, known genre authors such as Anne Perry operated there, and the occasional dabbler such as Mark Frost would bring life with the publication of a novel like 'The List of Seven'. But they weren't big business and they weren't big money -- until the 1994 publication of Caleb Carr's 'The Alienist'. With a single novel Carr electrified the reading world like no other author since Thomas Harriss released 'Silence of the Lambs'. 'The Alienist' had an appeal that crossed boundaries from science fiction readers, who could revel in Carr's 'world-building', to horror readers, who found terror in his dark cityscapes and casual violence, to mystery readers, who could not turn the pages fast enough to find what would happen next, to readers of historical fiction, who could feast on Carr's rich details and effectively organic use of real historical figures in a fictional framework. Carr followed 'The Alienist' up with 'The Angel of Darkness', another story with the same characters and setting that to this reader was nearly as good, though not as original. There's certainly nothing like the first time you encounter a great fictional creation, and there are few creations with the verve and grit of Doctor Laszlo Kreitzler.

Set in New York City in 1896, 'The Alienist' begins as Theodore Roosevelt, then Police Commissioner of New York, enlists the aid of Kreitzler and John Schuyler Moore, a crime reporter for the New York Times. A series of murders of adolescent boys is causing a rising panic in the city. With Sara Howard, a police secretary, they will work to determine who is killing the boys by determining why the boys are being killed. It's nothing less than the birth of profiling as it is known today, in a dank and musty city of yesterday.

The potential for trite walk-on history and anachronistic problem solving is enormous in 'The Alienist', but Carr's ultra-detailed and dense storytelling style overcome these traps before the reader even realizes that they could be problems. What Carr does is to present us with a picture of the city so detailed and so different from our own sensibilities that it seems almost as if the novel is a work of fantasy or science fiction. Dripping with sewage and slime, the streets running with offal and blood, 'The Alienist' presents a picture that the writer builds brick by brick. It all seems so unusual that the reader never has the chance to question Carr's authoritative picture. It's a gripping creation.

Horror Mystery

**Book of Lies**  - by Brad Meltzer - In Chapter Four of the Bible, Cain kills Abel. It is the world's most famous murder. But the Bible is silent about one key detail: the weapon Cain used to kill his brother. That weapon is still lost to history.   
  
In 1932, Mitchell Siegel was killed by three gunshots to his chest. While mourning, his son dreamed of a bulletproof man and created the world's greatest hero: Superman. And like Cain's murder weapon, the gun used in this unsolved murder has never been found.

Until now.   
  
Today in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Cal Harper comes face-to-face with his family's greatest secret: his long-lost father, who's been shot with a gun that traces back to Mitchell Siegel's 1932 murder. But before Cal can ask a single question, he and his father are attacked by a ruthless killer tattooed with the anicent markings of Cain. And so begins the chase for the world's first murder weapon.

Mystery Suspense

**My Enemy's Cradle** by Sara Young - Sara Young’s novel explores one of Nazi Germany’s least-known tragic legacies. A cruel twist of fate places Cyrla—a half-Jewish girl hiding from the Nazis among her Dutch relatives—with the terrible choice between certain discovery and taking her cousin Anneke’s place in the Lebensborn, a home for women carrying German babies. From this moment, Cyrla finds all of her assumptions about love and family challenged, her world cracked in two.

Historical Fiction

**Prospero Lost** - part of Prospero's trilogy by Jagi Lamplighter More than four hundred years after the events of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest,* the sorcerer Prospero, his daughter Miranda, and his other children have attained everlasting life. Miranda is the head of her family’s business, Prospero Inc., which secretly has used its magic for good around the world. One day, Miranda receives a warning from her father: "Beware of the Three Shadowed Ones." When Miranda goes to her father for an explanation, he is nowhere to be found.   
  
Miranda sets out to find her father and reunite with her estranged siblings, each of which holds a staff of power and secrets about Miranda’s sometimes-foggy past. Her journey through the past, present and future will take her to Venice, Chicago, the Caribbean, Washington, D.C., and the North Pole. To aid her, Miranda brings along Mab, an aerie being who acts like a hard-boiled detective, and Mephistopheles, her mentally-unbalanced brother. Together, they must ward off the Shadowed Ones and other ancient demons who want Prospero’s power for their own….

Fantasy – Urban Fantasy

**Daughter of Nefertiti's Daughter** by Cathy Moran?

**Cleopatra’s Daughter** – Moran - A descriptive, loosely based biography of Marie Grosholtz in France during the bloody revolution. The effort that the author put into the novel is fantastic, and her research is obvious. While the novel proceeded slowly in some areas, it was also fascinating and detailed to further the reader's imagination and interest. My only qualm is that the book is called "Madame Tussaud", but since the novel mostly only chronicled the life of Marie before she married Monsieur Tussaud, it isn't really accurate. However, I learned a lot about the French Revolution, and I like the perspective that the author takes to show new sides of the minds behind the Bloody Revolution. Reading this book made me change some of my opinions on Robespierre and his fellow accomplices simply because the way Ms. Moran portrayed them in the novel. Recommended to historybuffs, or anyone interested in a fresh, descriptive take on the life of Marie Grosholtz and her work. [(less)](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8689913-madame-tussaud)

**Madame Toussoud** A descriptive, loosely based biography of Marie Grosholtz in France during the bloody revolution. The effort that the author put into the novel is fantastic, and her research is obvious. While the novel proceeded slowly in some areas, it was also fascinating and detailed to further the reader's imagination and interest. My only qualm is that the book is called "Madame Tussaud", but since the novel mostly only chronicled the life of Marie before she married Monsieur Tussaud, it isn't really accurate. However, I learned a lot about the French Revolution, and I like the perspective that the author takes to show new sides of the minds behind the Bloody Revolution. Reading this book made me change some of my opinions on Robespierre and his fellow accomplices simply because the way Ms. Moran portrayed them in the novel. Recommended to historybuffs, or anyone interested in a fresh, descriptive take on the life of Marie Grosholtz and her work. [(less)](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8689913-madame-tussaud)

**North to the Night** by Alvah Simon - What a read this book turned out to be. If you enjoyed "Into Thin Air", you'll like this one. Much like "Into Thin Air" it's the story of a man who's spirit of adventure almost gets the best of him, as he sets off to explore and experience a world once unknown to him on his own. As his journey progresses he begins to realize that as much as he'd like to think he's in control, there is a higher power that seems to be watching over him and keeping him safe. What I enjoyed most about the book were the pictures in my mind I was creating as Alvah was describing them in print: the giant ice-bergs, the polar bears, night that streched on for months and the reapperance of the sun. It was fun to read and really was an interesting way to learn about a part of the world (and the people that live there) that I really hadn't read much about.

**Juliet** by Anne Fortier - This book is a somewhat entertaining modern day re-telling of the story of Romeo and Juliet, complete with warring families, a look at Italian history, and, of course, love. I have seen this book variously described as a love story, a historical novel, and a thriller, but it's not outstanding in any of these categories. For this reason, the book fell a bit short.  
  
The story follows Julie Jacobs (aka Giulietta Tolomei) as she learns that her long- deceased mother left a treasure for her to find in Siena, Italy. This sets the stage for Julie's trip to Siena to follow clues in search of her family's great secret. The text alternates between Julie's modern day discoveries in Italy and the historical background of the story of Romeo and Juliet. The bits on the history of Romeo and Juliet were at times revealing and interesting, but a lot of it is really just a re-telling of a story that is already familiar. Julie's modern-day search through Siena for her mother's treasure is at times utterly captivating and fast-paced, but at other times began to fell flat. This seemed particularly true in the case of the romance that blooms for Julie during her search. It felt a bit silly and superficial. Julie's twin sister, Janice, is thrown in for comic relief, but mostly the pair of them squabbled and appeared to be years younger than the age of 25. In many areas it almost read like a teen novel.  
  
In summary, there were chunks of this book that were exciting and interesting and without question lived up to the rave reviews I've read in magazines. But in many other areas the story fell flat. The different elements of the book (thriller, romance, historical fiction) were not terrific as stand-alone plot points, and were just not as tightly woven as they might have been. This uneven quality to the book earned it 3 stars.

Missing by Margeret Peterson Haddix

**Shadow Children** by Margeret Peterson Haddix - It is now the future, and for any third child in this society, it is not a good time in which to be living. The Population Police have the task of strictly enforcing the law--only two children per family. A famine had occurred, resulting in near starvation for many and widespread conflict. Enter the Population Police and their new tactics to solve the problem--population control and a stiff fine for anyone not following the two child rule.

But the Garner Family has a third child, a shadow child, who is Luke. Life is very unpleasant for Luke--he must be kept hidden at all costs. He cannot be a "normal" child. Luke cannot attend school, play outside, or make any movement inside the house, as the Population Police is always on the lookout for violators.

But then one day in the housing development across from his farm house, he sees a shade being lifted and a face appearing in the window. Soon Luke's life will change and he will need to make a decision as to whether to challenge this totalitarian regime, and learning the meaning of "free".

**The Kitchen House** by Kathleen Grissom - I had a hard time deciding exactly how to rate this one, and I'll explain why. "The Kitchen House" by Kathleen Grissom is a novel I was sure I'd love when I read the blurb. I'm a history buff, particularly fond of the South, and an avid reader.  
  
First, the parts I loved. The characters are well-drawn and easy to love or hate, depending on which one we're talking about. Most points are plausible, which shows the author must have done a great deal of research. The plot gave this book a storyline I absolutely enjoyed; as I fell asleep each night during the time I read this, I'd wondered about the characters and what would happen to them.  
  
Now onto the parts I wasn't so fond of. The main problem I had with the prose was that so many large sections were told in a summerized fashion, as opposed to being written in a way that gave the reader more connection with the story, a great example of the wrong side of the 'show vs tell' writers are warned against. Some historical facts were recited in a teacherly manner instead of being better incorporated into the story. There were A LOT of redundant areas where the reader repeated the exact same thing over and over and over, which greatly detracted from the story and made me wonder if word count had been an issue. One example would be when the parentage of a particular person was discussed between different characters in one chapter at least four times using nearly the same wording. There were a few historical points that I think were a bit off, and the accents could have more accurate. For example, the main character Lavinia is straight off the ship from Ireland but there is only one mention of her accent and it never shows through in her dialogue.

**Alter of Bones -** Reading "Altar of Bones" by Philip Carter was like reading a two-hour movie of the week. It's got everything you could want in a fast-paced action-oriented novel, including car chases, assassination attempts, exposed conspiracy theories, riddles, potentially supernatural elements, sexual tension, good guys, bad guys, (and sometimes you aren't sure which is which)...you get the idea. Everything but the kitchen sink is thrown at you leading to a page-turning read.  
  
"Philip Carter" is a pseudonym for an internationally renowned author. I'm not sure who it is yet but this book is obviously not a first attempt by a new author. The two main characters, while not showing National Book Award level characterization, (who would want that in a thriller book anyway?) are well drawn and for the most part, I cared what happened to them. I did have some issues with the secondary characters. There are quite a few of them and they tended to be a bit one-dimensional. Perhaps a little more characterization with fewer supporting characters might be preferable. My favorite thriller novels always have fantastic bad guys and I felt this novel fell a little short in that regard, thus knocking it down one star but still, I enjoyed this one a lot.

**The Devil's Queen -** Jeanne Kalogridis' novel of Catherine de Medici, "The Devil's Queen," is skillfully read by Kate Reading in this five disc collection. In Reading's capable hands, the story of Catherine becomes a compelling one. Kalogridis' historical novel, which at times borders on melodramatic, allows the often vilified French queen to tell her own story. And quite a story it is.  
  
Catherine is famous as the wife of one French king and the mother of three others; she is infamous as the architect of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of French Protestants. And history has further condemned her close relationship with the astrologer Cosimo Ruggieri.  
  
Was Catherine an evil queen of epic proportions? Kalogridis attempts to purchase a little compassion for Catherine by explaining her tumultuous background and her compelling mission to both protect her husband and to ensure the continuation of his line. Surely she was a strong queen who faced adversity - whether in the form of revolting French Protestants or her husband's much beloved mistress, Diane de Poitiers - with courage and élan.  
Did she rule through witchcraft? The French people seemed to think so, and Kalogridis shows her making her deal with the devil.  
  
The novel itself is dramatic and fast paced; Reading's presentation is compelling. But it is not a happy story; not only is Catherine not a sympathetic figure, but also the novel itself can be rather graphic and heavy handed.  
  
Three and a half stars: It will appeal to many listeners but is too melodramatic for serious readers and not romantic/sympathetic enough for those looking for a good historical romance.

**No Ordinary Time** by Doris Kerns GoodwinThis book is entitled *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*. Goodwin's idea was to write a history of World War II, not from a military standpoint, but rather, about what happened here in the United States. It is also a psychohistory about Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt. Goodwin becomes a psychoanalyst, who delves into their childhood traumas, emotional lives, family relationships, and even their extra-marital affairs, to create an understanding of them as human beings.

**Thirty Pieces of Silver** - Dr. Rebecca Monroe is a geneticist traveling the world in search of the elusive Smart Gene. Her mentor & one time lover, Dr Archibald Lochum, long thought dead by the scientific community is in search of the bones of Jesus Christ. Both Doctors Monroe and Lochum are sought by the ultra secretive society, The Knot and by US Special Forces in a mad romp across Europe. At odds with one another for years, they are forced to once again work together to thwart The Knot.  
  
From the first paragraph of this outlandishly implausible plot yet believable novel, I was mesmerized and interested in the story. I was interested in the search for the 13, I was interested in the story of Judas and his relationship with Jesus. I was interested in the building attraction between the two major characters.  
  
McCray has written a novel populated with deeply believable people, some of whom I would love to have as friends, or even just to talk with over cocktails. Even the despicable characters are interesting and achingly human. The "good guys" are not always likeable and I grew to like and care for the "bad guys" as well. The lines blur to enrich the story.  
  
This novel unfolds as the cast of characters race from city to city, holy site to holy site following clues left behind nearly 2,000 years ago. Like in the novels of Dan Brown, we are given historical tidbits from Christianity as well as Islam. We learn the history of the buildings that have become holy sites to both religions.  
  
Ms. McCray does not load you down with history, does not overload you with the minutia of religious history. The information is there, to be sure; it is not boring, dry or distracting.  
  
She keeps the information coming, keeps it interesting and just when you thought it was over, wallops you with yet another unforeseen plot twist. And you're off and running again after barely catching your breath.  
  
This is an amazingly gripping and exciting novel populated with believable characters. Read it!